

Multilateral Submarine Rescue Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region

By Cmdr. Timothy P. Hagan, USN

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*If we have a submarine casualty,
national boundaries vanish.*

Rear Adm. John B. Padgett III, USN
Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

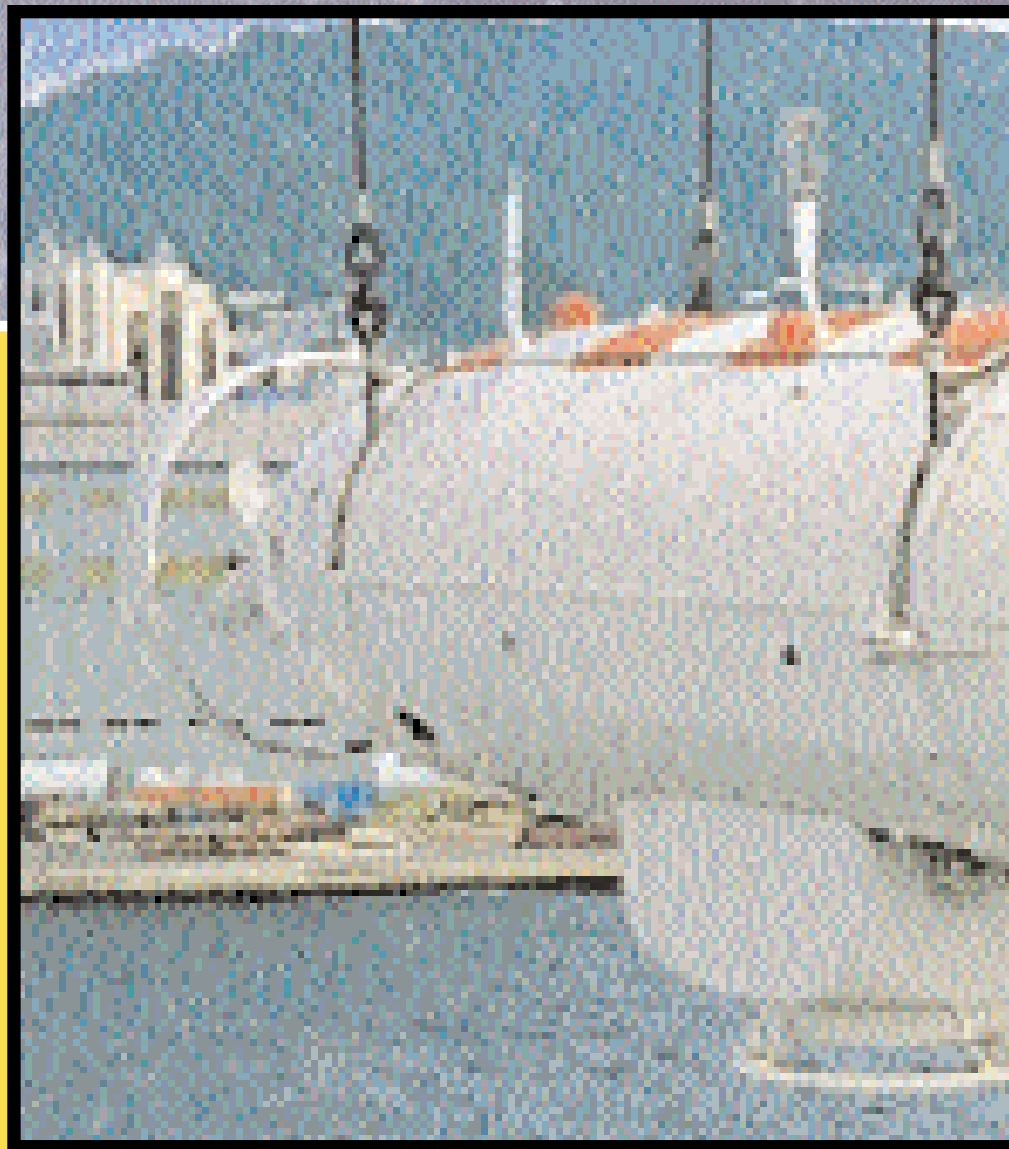
Submarine operating navies of the Asia-Pacific region face a daunting problem if they ever confront a situation where one of their submarines and crew is unable to surface. With the Russian Navy's *Kursk* submarine tragedy of August 2000 still fresh in memories, submariners from regional navies gathered at two events to increase regional cooperation in submarine search and rescue operations.

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A Japanese sailor emerges from the U.S. Navy Submarine Rescue Chamber after a practice rescue from a submerged submarine during exercise PACIFIC REACH hosted by Singapore.

The short time available to conduct rescue operations creates a need to plan and practice with regional partners to bring all available assets to the scene of the accident without delay. Rear Adm. John Padgett, Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, summarized this view, saying, "If we have a submarine casualty, national boundaries vanish."

The two multinational submarine rescue events were Exercise PACIFIC REACH 2000 and the Inaugural Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference. The exercise and conference provided international members of the normally tight-lipped "Silent Service" a chance to exchange ideas and operate together to improve cooperation and interoperability should a submarine rescue operation ever become necessary in the Pacific. The first event was the exercise.



Exercise PACIFIC REACH

*A significant milestone
in regional maritime
cooperation.*

Rear Adm. Lui Tuck Yew, RSN
Chief of Navy, Republic of Singapore

Exercise PACIFIC REACH 2000 was the first multilateral submarine rescue exercise ever conducted in the Pacific. The exercise was hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and conducted in the South China Sea approximately 200 nautical miles from Singapore, 2 to 14 October 2000. Submarines and submarine rescue systems were provided by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), the Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN), the RSN, and the U.S. Navy

(USN). Representatives from Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia and the United Kingdom joined the exercise as observers.

In addition to providing an opportunity for interaction among submarine operators in the region, the exercise verified the interoperability of each participating nation's submarine rescue system. The exercise also provided proficiency training for rescue system operators on a variety of simulated distressed submarines. PACIFIC REACH's ambitious goals were to:

- Demonstrate the capabilities of the participating nations' submarine rescue systems



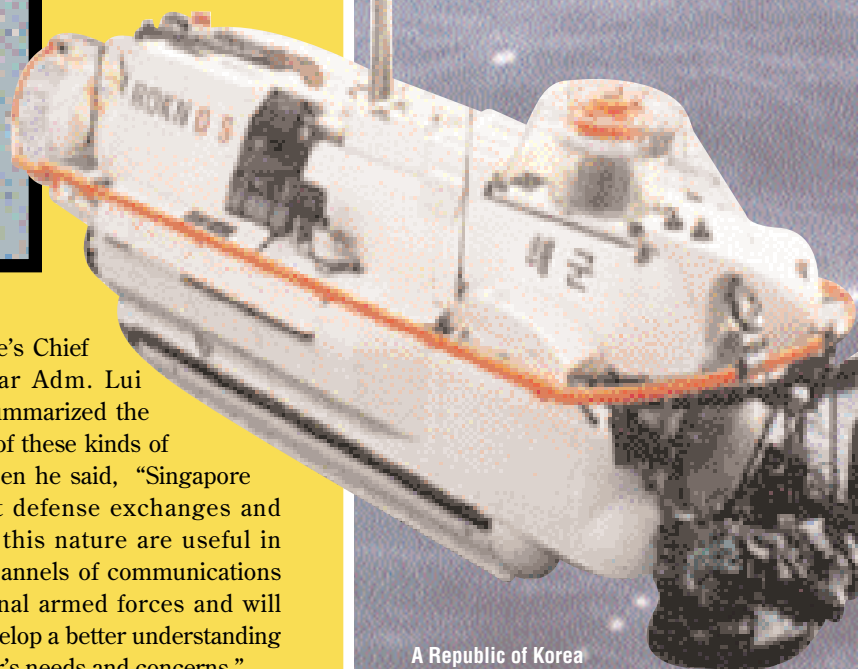
A Japanese Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle from the JDS *Chiyoda* is lowered for multilateral simulated submarine rescues from Korean and Singaporean submarines, during PACIFIC REACH.

- Improve submarine rescue techniques and provide training and experience for all participating countries in a realistic environment
- Exercise medical procedures related to submarine rescue
- Test a suitable seaport/airport combination for the embarkation of rescue assets
- Achieve a degree of interoperability that will allow participating nations to operate together in this humanitarian mission
- Initiate the development of uniform and proven rescue procedures for use in the Western Pacific

Singapore's Chief of Navy, Rear Adm. Lui Tuck Yew, summarized the overall value of these kinds of exercises, when he said, "Singapore believes that defense exchanges and exercises of this nature are useful in enhancing channels of communications among regional armed forces and will help us to develop a better understanding of one another's needs and concerns."

Many "firsts" were accomplished during PACIFIC REACH. These included:

- The first multilateral submarine rescue exercise ever held in the Pacific



A Republic of Korea Navy Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle from the ROKS *Cheung Hae Jin* is lowered for exercise rescues from Japanese and U.S. submarines.

- The first time a RSN submarine participated in a multinational exercise
- The first time the JMSDF and ROKN submarine rescue ships, JDS *Chidoya* and ROKS *Cheung Hae Jin*, deployed overseas
- The first overseas deployment of the U.S. Navy's Submarine Rescue Chamber (SRC) Flyaway System
- The first use of the Atmospheric Diving System and a vessel of opportunity to support the SRC in a submarine rescue exercise
- The first mating of the USN SRC and the ROKN Navy's Deep-Sea Recovery System with a foreign submarine
- The first time the JMSDF Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle conducted a mating exercise with a ROKN and a RSN submarine
- The first time JMSDF and ROKN submarines visited Singapore
- The first time the JMSDF participated as a multilateral partner in an international exercise

As can be expected from conducting an exercise of this magnitude, valuable lessons were learned in the areas of

exercise planning, rescue system interoperability, and the command and control of rescue assets. Lessons learned from each other were especially valuable. Rear Adm. Lui observed that these exercises "allow the respective navies to be familiar with each other's operating procedures and equipment." He continued, "And this will come in very useful should we have to deal with any contingencies."

Dealing with such contingencies was on the minds of many submariners participating in the exercise. "If something unfortunate happens, we know now that we can get help from all the navies that participated in this exercise," said Capt. Kim Jung-du of the ROK Navy. To capitalize on the valuable lessons learned, future PACIFIC REACH exercises are being planned every two years.

PACIFIC REACH 2000, a historic and groundbreaking exercise, was successful in all respects. All exercise goals were accomplished due to the detailed planning and superb execution by all countries involved. Rear Adm. Lui called Exercise PACIFIC REACH "a significant milestone in regional maritime cooperation."

Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference



Response to any submarine emergency in the Pacific will involve many of our collective assets. The importance of being able to work together rapidly in this area has certainly been highlighted by the Kursk tragedy.

Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, USN
Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet



The second multinational submarine rescue event was the Inaugural Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference, 6 to 9 August 2001. This groundbreaking event included submarine operators from Australia, Canada, China, France, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States as participants, as well as observers from Malaysia and Thailand. The Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Rear Adm. John B. Padgett III, hosted the conference in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The primary theme for this first conference was "Submarine Rescue in the Asia Pacific Region." As Rear Adm. Padgett said in his opening remarks, "The submarine's biggest threat is the sea pressure that surrounds it. Submarine rescue is an area where cooperation on a global scale is essential." The need for cooperation in submarine

search and rescue was also reiterated by Rear Adm. Lee Hong Hee, Commander, Submarine Flotilla Nine of the ROKN, who said, "Multinational cooperation is much more effective than independent work. We must be willing to make a memorandum for submarine rescue on the basis of humanitarian needs."

Since every country attending the gathering did not participate in Exercise PACIFIC REACH 2000, the conference provided an opportunity to contribute to the development of regional initiatives for submarine rescue. Each participating nation was able to brief the group on their submarine rescue capabilities, programs and priorities. These briefings encouraged spirited discussions on topics that included rescue procedures and operations, training, information management, research and development, medical assistance, and command and

Submariners from 10 submarine-operating nations, plus two observer countries, met in Honolulu for the Inaugural Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference to plan cooperative efforts to save lives. The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet's Submarine Force, Rear Adm. John B. Padgett, addresses conference attendees.

control of a multilateral submarine rescue operation. Several recurring themes emerged throughout the three days of discussions.

First, submarine rescue is a humanitarian mission requiring cooperation in a time of crisis. Cmdr. Deep Mathur, the Indian Navy's Deputy Director for Submarine Acquisition, summed up this issue by saying, "The submarine safety and rescue seminar is a timely initiative. It takes place at a time when the complexities and pitfalls of the business of submarine rescue have received global exposure. It would be an appropriate launch pad for bringing to the fore unity of effort in the global context, should such an eventuality arise anywhere, any time. Submarine rescue needs to be understood as a humanitarian need, rather than a naval or military operation."

To promote the broadest cooperation, the conference tried to include the maximum number of submarine-operating nations from the Pacific, resulting in it being the first region-wide submarine forum. China's participation was a key factor in contributing to this goal. As Ambassador Charles H. Twining, then Foreign Policy Advisor to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (USCINCPAC) told the group, "We are no longer in the Cold War, nor is it in anyone's interest to expand military rivalries. USCINCPAC, Adm. Dennis C. Blair, likes to point out that no framework for security in the Asia-Pacific region will be complete without unprecedented cooperation among regional armed forces. This involves shared procedures, communications, and planning. All countries must be included in this cooperative effort."

A second consistent theme was the need for formal rescue agreements to define responsibilities. "It is my opinion that we should set the ball rolling by forming a core group at this juncture to work out details of a Multilateral Submarine Rescue Agreement," said Cmdr. Mathur. While there was sub-

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stantial debate regarding the form and scope of a proposed agreement, there was consensus regarding the need to establish one.

Lt. Cmdr. Jeong Sung Kyun of the ROKN stated, "A collaboration between member nations shall be a great help to develop each nation's rescue program, because it can take into account the uniqueness of each country as well as international common factors."

Conference participants agreed that sharing information as part of the planning process would be vital to the success of an actual submarine rescue operation. This information includes submarine rescue systems specifications and technical data, availability and configuration details of support vessels, availability of medical assets, results and lessons learned from exercises.

Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, made the implications of cooperation very clear. "The inroads you make this week will enable the exchange of planning and technical information that is required to facilitate rapid response in an emergency. We will not have to wonder whether our equipment and platforms can work together, and we will not have to take precious time in the early hours of an emergency to conduct technical analysis to satisfy ourselves that the rescue operations will neither jeopardize the disabled submarine nor the rescue vessel itself. This type of analysis can and should be done, as well as collaboration tools for developing agreements and plans ahead of time as part of a well-prepared international response plan."

Finally, conference participants strongly agreed about the need to continue

regional rescue exercises, and to expand them in scope and complexity, as well as to open participation to other regional nations. ROKN Lt. Cmdr. Jeong captured the group's inclinations by suggesting, "We should conduct regularly scheduled combined rescue exercises, and share experience and lessons learned from local training, international exercises, and actual rescue operations. I am sure it will save time, cost, and man-hour requirements. Best of all, it will save lives."

The first Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference was successful in establishing a forum for engagement for Pacific submarine operators. It provided an opportunity for participants to educate one another on their capabilities and concerns, identify weaknesses in regional cooperative efforts, and most importantly, to develop relationships and provide a means for continued interaction between the participants.

Ambassador Twining said, "As you work together, you form a network of relations that can address common problems. You develop habits of cooperation and a shared sense of responsibility. Not only does it result in benefiting all those involved, but I can think of no better way to help assure peace in the region."

Conference participants uniformly agreed that the conference was a valuable first step toward improved cooperation. "I must say that the conference was very timely. I look forward to further enhancing this relationship that I believe can only augur well for submarine safety in the region," said First Admiral Kamal bin Darus, Commander, Naval Area 1 of the Royal Malaysian Navy.



The conference brought Asia-Pacific submariners together to save lives. A Chinese Navy officer, Capt. Fang Ai Yi, talks with two U.S. Navy commanders during a conference break.

It was agreed that the Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference will be held on an annual basis, with host duties rotating among participating nations. Planning is also underway for the next PACIFIC REACH exercise to be hosted by Japan in April 2002 near Sasebo.

Adm. Fargo summed up the accomplishments of this first multinational conference of submariners, saying, "Collectively, the seeds you plant today may one day blossom into relationships that save lives in our future." □